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Herty Announces Launch of Consortium for Advanced Wood-to-Energy Solutions

October 30, 2014

The Georgia Southern University [Herty Advanced Materials Development Center](#), Savannah, GA (Herty), U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities (Endowment); and the USDA Forest Service Forest Products Laboratory, Madison, WI (FPL); announced the launch of the Consortium for Advanced Wood-to-Energy Solutions (CAWES). The consortium's goal is to spearhead development of commercially-viable, advanced wood-to-energy products that can be produced from low-value trees and forest residues that can compromise forest health and increase the frequency of wildfires.

The U.S. Endowment and the Forest Service, via its State & Private Forestry division, have “jump started” the consortium with a \$4 million investment designed to identify and fill critical research, development, and deployment needs in launching successful commercial biomass to energy products operations.

Deteriorating forest health conditions—due to overstocked stands, insect and disease killed timber, and extremely limited market options for low-value forest biomass—have led to increasing size, intensity, and acreage of wild land fires that are collectively consuming more than \$3 billion in federal tax dollars annually in suppression costs and billions more in economic and environmental loss, as well as loss of human life.

Large volumes of wood in the form of disease- and insect-killed trees, as well as slash, small diameter trees, and non-commercial species that need to be removed, are of no- or extremely low-commercial value as traditional wood-based products. Without markets for this low-value wood, forest landowners and land managers are left with few viable options to address deteriorating forest health conditions.

Development of commercially-viable and sustainable energy sources from low-value forest biomass is one of the most promising opportunities to develop new markets for wood. CAWES's initial focus will be on a process known as torrefaction. “Our initial work will center on determining the commercial viability of torrefaction—the ‘roasting’ of wood in a low oxygen environment—to create an energy dense product that can more easily be shipped, stored and used to produce renewable energy,” said Dr. Alexander Koukoulas, President & CEO of Herty.

“We are excited to be one of the founding partners in this important initiative designed to advance the health and vitality of our Nation's forests while growing family-wage jobs,” said Endowment President & CEO Carlton Owen. “The idea of linking some of the nation's leading research institutions in a rapid feedback system with product manufacturers is among the more promising aspects of CAWES.”

“CAWES is an open-platform collaborative of institutions in the public and private sectors representing green energy, forest management, research, philanthropy and private industry committed to advancing economically-viable, scalable, distributed wood-to-energy solutions that stimulate forest restoration and rural economic development through research and application of advanced wood-to-energy solutions,” said Dr. Ted Wegner, Assistant Director of FPL.

The founding partners will seek the participation of public and private institutions that share the commitment for addressing the challenges and opportunities of creating sustainable green energy products while advancing forest health and rural forest-rich communities.

Georgia Southern University, a public Carnegie Doctoral/Research University founded in 1906, offers more than 125-degree programs serving more than 20,500 students. Through eight colleges, the University offers bachelor's, master's and doctoral degree programs built on more than a century of academic achievement. Georgia Southern is recognized for its student-centered and hands-on approach to education.

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